

Story 2126 (1966 Tape 1

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Casualties of the Salt War

Laz people¹ are very proud of their cleverness, and this is a story about that cleverness.² The Lazes raised many different kinds of crops, but most of them were not very profitable. They therefore decided one year to plant salt, something which always sold for a good price. They went to the market and bought several bags of salt. This they planted in their fields and afterwards dragged a harrow over it in order to cover it up. They then watered their fields well

¹The word Laz referred originally to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces along the extreme eastern part of the Turkish Black Sea coast. More recently the word has come to be applied to any resident of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. In the Turkish oral tradition the Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept. This stereotype (like most others) is unjustifiable, for Lazes are, of course, much like other people.

²Lazes often tell numskull tales about themselves. Sometimes, however, they try to counter the stereotype by telling how they outwitted other people, including residents of Kayseri, who are stereotyped as the shrewdest people in all Turkey. The alleged cleverness of the Lazes is here quite ironic.

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They waited and waited for the salt to grow, but nothing showed above the ground in their fields. They concluded that there must be something eating their salt seeds. They decided to arm themselves and wait in their fields to kill the thief. One took a rake, one took an axe, one took a pickaxe, and yet another took a rifle. They spread out in their fields and waited for the appearance of any intruder

After awhile a grasshopper sprang up and landed on the face of one of the Lazes. He called out, "Look here! A strange creature has sprung upon my forehead. He may be the thief!" The Laz with the rifle took careful aim and shot the grasshopper. Of course he also shot the man upon whose face the grasshopper had landed.

The Laz with the rifle concluded, "This has not been an easy battle. We lost a friend, but the other side also suffered a casualty."